

Remarks by Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
Seattle Community Development Roundtable  
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Distinguished guests, Navy League members, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here among this distinguished group.

Your leadership in the business community is critical to the economic vitality of this great city and this region.

Real community development is not a product of government, or of new bureaucratic arrangements.

It is a result of the actions of private individuals—entrepreneurs, risk-takers with their own capital at risk, and the wise response to changes in the marketplace.

The Navy and the Marine Corps would like to continue to be a part of the communities surrounding the Pacific Northwest as we proudly serve in our Nation's armed forces in one of the most beautiful regions in the country.

Today I would like to discuss with you an issue that concerns me greatly—an issue that challenges the long-standing relationship between the Navy and our host communities—encroachment.

In that regard, I note that communities in the Puget Sound region have taken many positive steps with respect to that relationship, with many officials displaying an admirable perspective and understanding of the long-term issues involved.

Such a perspective stands in stark contrast to what we have seen in many other areas, and I would like to thank you for your support for what we do.

It is my intent here today to impress upon you how important it is to the Navy and the country that you continue acting in such an enlightened and responsible manner.

Encroachment is often a result of different priorities and different agendas as they relate to economic interests associated with land surrounding military installations.

Encroachment can also take the form of efforts to directly constrain military operations in the interest of environmental protection or quality of life considerations.

Unfortunately, in either case, the impact on our ability to train and operate can be

severe, and threaten to undo the decades of partnership we have established with civilian communities across the United States.

We need the military.

From the time of the Founding Fathers, there has never been a realistic vision of the United States that has not included capable, trained, and ready forces to deter aggression and protect us from those who may wish to do us harm.

Indeed, it is a Constitutional imperative.

Many people may not realize the critical importance of training to our operations.

Aircraft cannot land on carriers and ships cannot get underway without personnel who have developed the expertise to do so over years and years of training.

This is an obvious point to those who serve in uniform, but it is easy to forget for those less familiar with the nature of our operations, and who might see a multi-billion dollar ship and not realize just what is expected of the personnel who operate that ship.

Thus, any constraint on our ability to train is a threat to the very core of our Nation's security.

Training defines our ability to operate both in peacetime and in war.

Military operations—even in times of peace—incur, by their nature, a certain amount of risk.

We are required to manage risk in our everyday operations.

Maintaining a very high degree of training discipline is essential to that objective.

It is inconceivable that we would ask pilots to land on an aircraft carrier—especially at night—without having first gone through the entire training pipeline.

Without the proper training and facilities, they cannot do their jobs.

In many ways, the communities in this region have been leaders in resisting the trend towards encroachment, pro-actively avoiding some of the conflicts that have arisen elsewhere in the country.

Far-sighted, responsible actions have been taken at Whidbey Island to avoid future land uses that would encroach on Navy mission activities.

The land use controls local officials have adopted, combined with other innovative ways of providing buffer zones so as to restrict economic development, protect the public and protect the Navy's military operations and training.

The cooperative measures that have been taken by communities around Whidbey Island will allow us to continue performing our vital mission.

It is part of any community's civic responsibilities to support those charged by the Constitution to defend us—not only in principle, but concretely, in matters such as stewardship of the military's relationship with civilian communities.

In many ways, a community's search for the right balance is a classic case of short-term and long-term interests in conflict, and I would argue that many development ideas that are attractive in the short term do not serve the long-term interests of the community.

In the Pacific Northwest, communities are achieving this balance, and I would like to thank Island County and Oak Harbor officials, in particular, for what they are trying to do to avoid these problems.

I have received their development plans, and they are as good as any I have seen.

On the other side of the country, however, we are facing a real challenge in locating an area for use as an Outlying Landing Field.

Landings on an OLF are a critical part of a pilot's training before attempting landings on an aircraft carrier at sea, and are especially important preparations for landings at night.

An OLF enables a pilot to replicate the landing patterns used for carrier approaches, and needs to duplicate the pitch black conditions that a pilot faces in nighttime carrier landings.

On the East Coast, the Department of the Navy has conducted an exhaustive search in an effort to identify the most suitable and least intrusive inland training space, prioritizing such factors as the absence of housing, low population density, and environmental impact.

This work has gone on for more than a decade.

Even after having worked with state and local officials, we find ourselves challenged on every proposed location.

And yet, if no location is found, the impact on the Navy's ability to train—and on a community's economic interests—may be profound.

I am concerned that we are now facing a not-in-my-backyard scenario—and

letting national security considerations fall by the wayside.

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The encroachment issue is normally thought of as a land use matter, but it also extends to the maritime domain.

It may surprise you to know that the issue I spend the most time on is litigation contesting our use of sonar at sea.

If such litigation is successful, it will put an end to our ability to train and exercise as we intend to fight in the undersea warfare domain.

And so I have no choice but to devote as much time as necessary to preventing that from happening.

The Navy is a leader in developing and promoting measures to preserve the maritime environment.

We have a record that we are proud of, and we have a policy of transparency that invites public scrutiny and accountability.

Over the past several years, we have evolved a set of standard operating procedures aimed at reducing the effects of sonar that has resulted in no confirmed reports of sonar-related harm to whales over the past two years.

We agree that protecting the environment is very important.

But serving the public interest encompasses more than serving just one interest, to the exclusion of all others.

Even the Ninth Circuit Court—a forum that historically has been very sympathetic to environmental interests—recognized that the public interest is a function of many important interests, including national defense.

The Court notes that, quote:

“The public does indeed have a very considerable interest in preserving our natural environment and especially relatively scarce whales. But it also has an interest in national defense. We are currently engaged in war, in two countries. There are no guarantees extending from 2007 to 2009 or at any other time against other countries deciding to engage us, or our determining that it is necessary to engage other countries. The safety of the whales must be weighed, and so must the safety of our warriors. And of

our country.” End quote.

Quite so.

We were fortunate in this particular ruling.

But the battle over this issue is far from over, even though the principle at stake—the need to balance competing interests—is not new, for it is a principle that has been part of American law for centuries.

Indeed, there is a case before the Supreme Court now concerning limitations on our ability to train and operate at sea, a development that underscores the fact that we are in a very dangerous position.

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As both the OLF and sonar issues illustrate, the encroachment issue is not a trivial matter.

We face real national security challenges today, and we face a future with great uncertainties—including defense challenges that we would be irresponsible to ignore.

The debates we are having over the number of submarines or aircraft we can afford to build are important and necessary.

But they are potentially minor issues compared to the potential loss we would suffer if we cannot properly train our Sailors.

I hope that all of you will use your role as leaders in the business community to educate others about the importance of what we do, and about the threat that encroachment poses to our future.

The stakes are enormous, and they go to the heart of our national security interests.

They are fundamental because one of the greatest differentiators between our military and the militaries of every other nation is our superior training.

One of the things that has impressed me the most in my time as Secretary is the clear advantage we derive from the capabilities of our Sailors and Marines.

We owe our warfighters the best training possible, and with your continued support, America will remain free, strong, and protected from those who wish to do us harm.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless America.